

Art Fairs

Here Are 5 Outsider Artists With Fascinating Life Stories to Discover at the Outsider Art Fair

There is a lot to see in the 27th edition of the New York fair.

Brian Boucher, January 18, 2019



Opening Preview for the Outsider Art Fair, 2019. Photo: BFA/Darian DiCianno.

There were smiles everywhere in the preview hours of the 27th edition of the Outsider Art Fair in New York, open now through Sunday at the Metropolitan Pavilion. This year, the show includes more than 65 international exhibitors presenting works by artists who have taken non-traditional paths to art-making, far away from the floodlights of glitz and cash often associated with the art market.

You can buy works here for practically nothing. Chicago artist David Holt's obituary-style drawings of recently deceased historical figures such as Carrie Fisher and

George H.W. Bush (on view at the Project Onward booth) go for \$100. But if you have a real coin to spend, head over to the Ricco Maresca booth, where you can pick up a drawing by Martín Ramírez for \$185,000.

There's a lot to see in this year's excellent edition of the fair, but here are five artists to look for especially.

Jayne County
James Barron Art, Kent, Connecticut



Jayne County, *Untitled* (1980–2004). © Jayne County. Courtesy of James Barron Art.

“Some people are at odds with the world and they become serial killers, and others become artists,” says cult transgender glam/punk musician, Stonewall rioter, and Warhol Factory actress Jayne County, who—gods be praised—is also a self-trained artist. Onstage, she’s known for songs like “Are You Man Enough to Be a Woman,” but she’s had less recognition for her visual artwork, priced here from \$4,000 to

\$8,000. Good news for collectors: a score of them remained available at the end of the preview.



Jayne County, *Attack of the Sodomites* (1982–2007). © Courtesy of the artist.

County’s engrossing acrylic and marker drawings—some abstract, some stylishly figurative—recall the dotted patterning of Australian aboriginal art. Other works, in ink and felt-tip pen, include figures straight out of Egyptian painting. Anyone easily scandalized should avert his or her eyes from *Attack of the Sodomites*, which features a wealth of figures with gargantuan phalluses—and an abundance of ejaculate.

Newliu
In “Good Kids: Underground Comics from China”



Newliu's comics. Courtesy of the artist.

Organized by Noguchi Museum director Brett Littman with Zhou Yi, partner and curator at the C5 Art Center in Beijing, "Good Kids" is a focused presentation of works by 10 Chinese artists whose anti-conformist attitudes make their drawings and comics impossible to distribute at scale; to see their work, you'll have to find it online or seek it out in their studios.

The booth has a table piled high with books and zines, and the most ambitious among the book-making artists included is Newliu, who lives in Sichuan province and about whom even Littman and Zhou know precious little. His individual drawings are priced between \$450 and \$600; several remained available at the end of the preview hours.



Newliu's comics. Courtesy of the artist.

“He is definitely pushing the boundaries of the form in terms of length and complexity,” says Littman, pointing out that some of his books stretch into the hundreds of pages.

On view are booklets from his “Me and Lee” series, about his post-collegiate experience building a business along with an ambitious, eccentric entrepreneur. “But the dream of getting rich was too good to be true,” Zhou Yi said at the preview.

Valentino Dixon
Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York

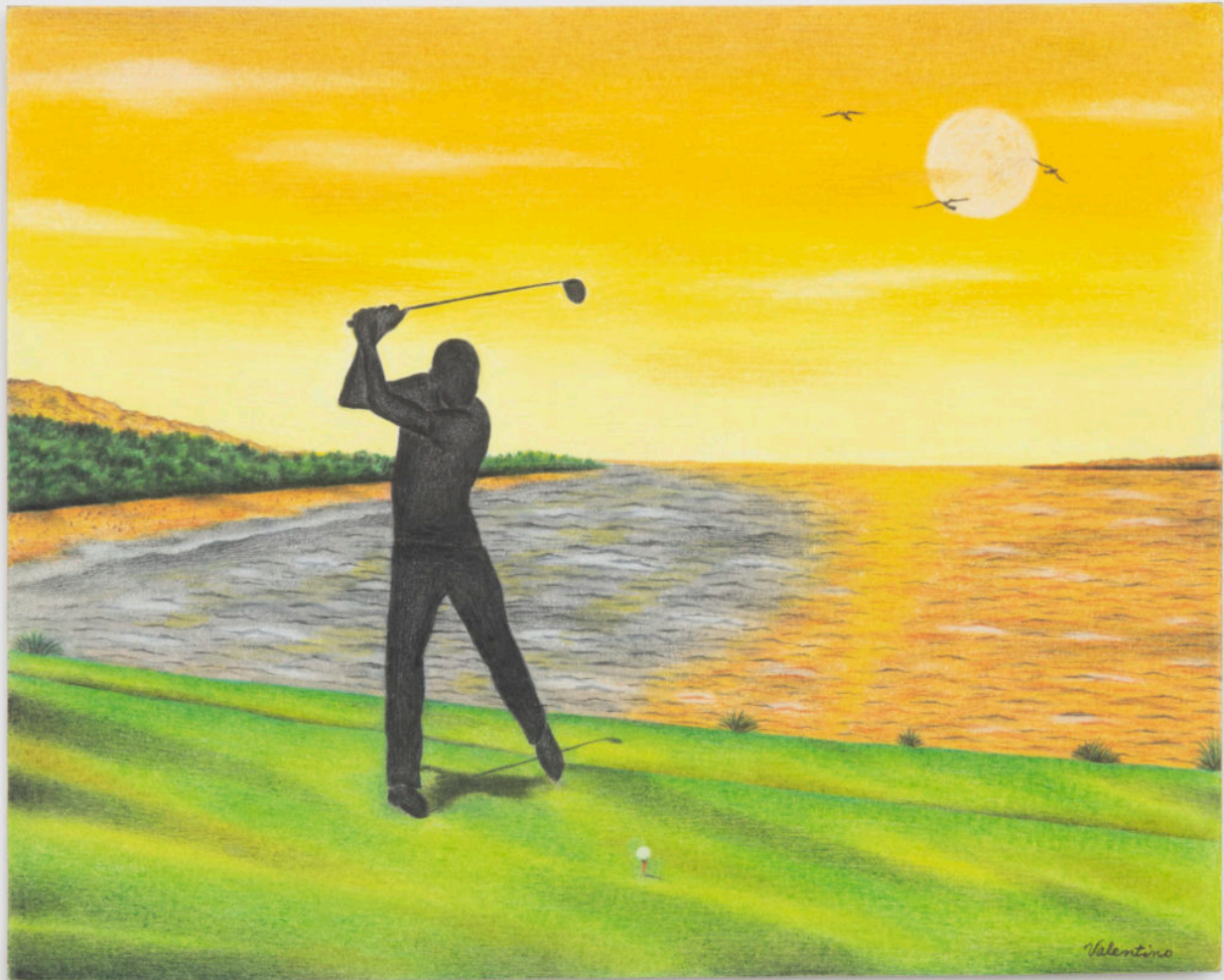


Valentino Dixon, *Untitled* (2011–2012). Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery.

Andrew Edlin, the New York dealer and owner of the Outsider Art Fair, reliably shows top material, and he's scored a big win with Valentino Dixon.

The artist was wrongfully imprisoned for 27 years after a fatal shooting in Upstate New York in 1991. At Attica, where he passed the time by drawing, a warden asked him to reproduce a picture of the Augusta National Golf Club's twelfth hole ("a bear to play because of swirling winds," according to the course's website).

"I know it makes no sense, but for some reason my spirit is attuned to this game," the artist told *Golf Digest* magazine, explaining how he went on to obsessively draw landscapes from photos in the publication despite never having set foot on a course.



Valentino Dixon, *Untitled* (2011–2012). Courtesy of Andrew Edlin Gallery.

After the magazine’s editors got wind of his work, their research turned up evidence of a grievous miscarriage of justice, which then came to the attention of Georgetown University’s Prison Reform Project. Dixon was exonerated last September.

“Sometimes art just has that mystery element,” Edlin says. “They’re beautifully rendered and they just glow. What he’s been through, it makes you want to help him out.” A large drawing priced at \$4,000 had sold by the end of the preview, but two smaller drawings were still available for \$1,000 each.

Mario Mendoza
Julie Saul Gallery, New York



Mario Mendoza, *Untitled*. Courtesy of Julie Saul Gallery.

No one knows much about the life of Mexico City's Mario Mendoza, who died in the 1980s. The expert thus far is Wellesley art history professor James Oles, who happened upon his works at a flea market in the Mexican capital.

Some of his ballpoint and felt-tip pen drawings from the 1930s and '40s feature caricatures of figures like Hitler and Stalin, but the drawings on view at the Julie Saul Gallery booth, priced at \$1,200, depict different kinds of monsters: hairy, four-legged, bug-eye, sharp-toothed beasts.



Mario Mendoza, *Untitled*. Courtesy of Julie Saul Gallery.

“Some of them look vicious,” Saul said at the fair. “Some have features that recall Aztec art, and some look more like cartoon characters.”

Indeed, they're not always frightful. A purple creature with a teal face looks over his shoulder with a distinctly nervous expression; a winged creature with hands for feet holds a flower while sporting a playful grin.

Patients of Friern Hospital Shrine Gallery, New York



The Friern Hospital Collection. Courtesy of Shrine.

Even before French artist Jean Dubuffet coined the term “art brut” in the 1940s, a group of patients at Friern Hospital, on the outskirts of London, were creating strange and compelling drawings and paintings that are on view here for the first time in the US. Prices range from \$2,000 to \$7,000; by the end of the preview, a handful had sold but numerous sheets remained available.

One of the eeriest, by a patient named Lily Gibeon, shows a maniacally grinning cat whose insides we see in cross section, revealing a miniature feline within. Whether the animal is pregnant or a cannibal is unclear.



Miss Inger Jensen, *Prestige*. Courtesy of Shrine.

Another highlight, by the very accomplished painter Miss Inger Jensen, shows a man with a monk's tonsure hanging over a tree trunk in a scene that recalls a crucifixion—except for the naked women who float seductively around him.

“That’s one of the weirdest pieces,” says Scott Ogden, who runs the gallery. “It’s playful but with an erotic edge. Was she highly religious? There’s no telling.”